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Shop Control as a Manager Sees It

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THE policy of a production manager is frequently held in suspicion by labor, labor feeling that any policy adopted by a production manager will necessarily favor the immediate interests of the owners of the business and therefore be detrimental to labor. This suspicion is the natural outgrowth of a tradition handed down by generations of workers who have uniformly acted on the theory that any move beneficial to the owner must necessarily be against labor's best interests.

Labor, especially union labor, should realize that recent changes in industry have affected the attitude and viewpoint of the management as well as that of the individual worker. Today with management and organized labor more nearly on a par, as far as bargaining strength is concerned, the industrial welfare of the workers, both individually and collectively, is tied absolutely with that of the effectiveness of the management.

Every concern dealing with organized union labor assumes the responsibility not only of maintaining a successful business but also of safeguarding the position of its workers in every possible way. A production manager in carrying out the general policy of the firm must, if successful, treat his position as an impersonal and impartial one, knowing that his success depends upon satisfactory material benefits to be derived by both sides.

With this intention always in the foreground and for the purpose of centering the thought of organized labor on the problems confronting a produc-

tion manager, whose motives will be more or less open to question by individual members of union organizations, this article is written. Therefore this discussion of shop control applies to those plants wherein the workers are organized to such an extent that production is affected not only by the policy of the union as a whole but also by the acts of the individual workers who are protected by the union.

The term "production" is so generally misused both by the management and the workers that a clear understanding of the meaning of the term should be reached before the subject of shop control is further discussed. From a production manager's viewpoint, "production" should mean (a) maximum output tempered with a degree of quality that will satisfy the trade and meet competition, together with (b) factory conditions that provide for the physical well-being of the workers.

Such matters as health benefits, old-age pensions, seasonal employment or non-employment, and the care of employes who are below normal in strength or intelligence are altogether essential problems that must be provided for either through national or state legislation, special agreement between the unions and the employers or by the unions themselves. It is in the interest of society that such questions should be handled. They should not be considered as among the essential or inherent factors of production or as irremediable deterrents to production.

Production depends entirely upon

the conception and application of scientific manufacturing methods and is seriously handicapped by coupling it with social welfare considerations which, while vitally essential to the worker, are not an integral part of production.

Hours of work, wages, sanitation, labor-saving devices and similar working conditions are debatable, but to operate any individual plant in the most efficient manner, certain essentials to shop control must ultimately be left largely in the hands of the management by organized workers. These essentials are:

Selection of competent help.

Transferring of workers.

Use of temporary help.

Discipline.

Conception and application of production methods.

The setting of standards of output.

Quality.

In all this we assume a reasonable unity of purpose and sympathy as between the management and the workers. We also assume the progressive development of a considerable measure of real collective authority on the part of the workers. As the workers learn how to assume collective responsibility this will be made possible. In so far as a basis of reasonable confidence is not afforded, the workers must necessarily protect themselves in such wise as they find possible.

SELECTION OF HELP

Today, too frequently, the chief requisite from a union standpoint for the qualification of a worker is a union card, and for those shops that are required to call upon union headquarters for their supply of workers this is a serious handicap. The possession of a union card does not mean that the applicant for the position open can qualify for it, because union members

are not always selected on account of their knowledge or qualification for the crafts they follow.

The early history of union organization showed an inclination not to take into a craft-union any workers except skilled ones. "Unionism" at one time stood out for the protection of the crafts against incompetent workers and the skill of the worker had to be vouched for by members of the union before the applicant was given a working card.

Mass organization changed the policy of craft protection to one of protection to all workers affiliated with the craft and with the advent of the idea of "one big union" the requirements of apprenticeship and craft skill were almost completely disregarded, the result being an influx of workers into the craft organizations that were entirely unfitted to be called skillful.

The writer is not criticizing this change of policy, but is calling attention to it merely to give one reason why the unions should not unduly insist on the employment of those members who are out of work if they are not qualified to properly fill the vacancy, either from a technical or production standpoint.

Granting that in carrying out an idea somewhat analogous to the "one big union" it was necessary to take into the labor organization all the workers affiliated with the industry, once a particular industry is organized, more care can be given when taking in new members. Union organizations have reached the point of development where certain reforms appear to be necessary to prevent them from either growing stale or becoming unwieldy and any reform that affects the qualification of a worker does not need to be retroactive so as to make it affect a member who now holds a union card.

The qualifications of each worker should be taken into account when wages are set and the prime factor in organizing an industry, from the worker's standpoint, should be to place their members in jobs which they are reasonably competent to perform satisfactorily. Any other course will fill up a shop with workers whose delinquencies will in the end prevent operating the plant successfully.

Production should interest the union as vitally as the management because output must eventually govern real wages, and the unions must be as much interested as any group in the community in placing their members in positions which they are best qualified to fill so as to secure maximum output. In the end output must be the basis for increased wages or shorter hours.

Physical and mental competency must be considered in the employment not only to insure production and shop discipline but also to preserve the health and morale of the workers already employed. The selection of workers must be left entirely in the hands of the management for, with the present trend of management toward the maintenance of intelligent employment bureaus, great assistance can be given the unions in solving the problems inherent in mass organization. In the long run it would be to the interest of the union to remove any of the obstacles in the way of employment bureaus so as to enable them to properly choose and place new workers.

TRANSFERRING WORKERS

Flexibility is an essential quality of shop control. The transferring of workers is necessary in order to insure the balancing of operations and to prevent carrying an excessive amount of work in process. The transferring of workers to operations that they are not familiar with is usually in itself a

losing proposition to the management, but is necessary at times not only from a production standpoint, but also to insure continuous work for the entire shop. The unions, to carry out the principles of production which they have adopted, should not only refrain from interfering with such transfers, but should cooperate with the management in insisting on a fixed production from those transferred, based on the known ability of the workers so transferred.

The policy of the union regarding the transferring of workers must be broad enough to extend past the point of erecting the necessary safeguards required to protect the wages of the workers when temporarily transferred. The union must insist on the maximum output of which each transferred worker is capable, based on the worker's knowledge of the operation and, when necessary, must encourage the management in making permanent transfers to balance production so as to avoid the employment of unnecessary help.

A stabilized and predetermined output can only be secured by having the machinery for transferring workers reasonably flexible, as the union is chiefly interested in obtaining steady employment. Even though it may be necessary at times to reduce the wages on permanently transferred employees, it may still be a desirable policy because steady employment may mean a large increment to the entire personnel in real wages.

TEMPORARY HELP

Action has lately been taken by some unions to prevent manufacturing concerns taking on any temporary help. Under this policy industry would remain at a standstill, unable to take advantage of seasonal or excess business. This policy, fortunately, is only

in its infancy and, if promptly repudiated by the unions, will prevent serious trouble in a large number of shops, because every manufacturing concern that is compelled to vary its product requires, at times, either temporary or seasonal help. The life of any manufacturing organization depends upon its flexibility and to be frequently denied additional help, unless such help is considered permanent and unless the entire number of operators in a particular section or craft are guaranteed the same number of hours of employment as all other classes of workers, is a handicap so great that few manufacturers would be tempted to take advantage of any new opportunity that might arise. The only alternative the manufacturer has is overtime which, with wages at their present peak, is apt to be prohibitive and at all times undesirable.

DISCIPLINE

The success of any organization whether it be union, military, fraternal or industrial, depends as much on discipline as on any other single factor.

The more powerful the union organization becomes, the stronger the natural tendency grows to take the position that "the worker can do no wrong." This has resulted today in the local shop organization at times defending its members not only on substantial charges of bad work, loss of time that interferes with production and incompetency, but also on occasions when clearly guilty of theft, brutality, rowdiness and obscene actions.

The greatest danger confronting any organization is not its weakness but its strength. This fact has been clearly demonstrated in the present decade by the various changes in governments that have been established for centuries and by the loss of shop control

by reactionary executives who exercised their power to exploit their employees beyond human endurance.

Will the union organizations which are now at the height of their strength make the same mistake, or will they temper their strength by insisting on shop discipline? It should be clearly understood that protecting members when they are clearly in the wrong and thereby causing a feeling that "might is right" will not only lead to industrial chaos, but will also establish a condition among the workers which will effectually destroy any chance of success in the movement for the taking over of any industry by the workers.

Granting that, in the past, injustice was often done to the workers by some shop managements under the guise of discipline, the necessity for discipline still remains. Discipline within the union is recognized both by the labor organizations as a whole, and by the individual members thereof, and the union should enforce shop discipline with the same spirit it shows in enforcing discipline on its members in strictly union matters. "Sovietism" in Russia, if it is successful, will owe more to a rigid discipline than to the collective intelligence of the masses or to its individual leaders.

In speaking of discipline, reference is not made to the humiliating restrictions that have been forced on the workers in some plants in the past simply because the management was in a position to use the iron hand, but to general law and order in the shop such as prompt attendance, business courtesy, good workmanship, temporary inconvenience where the welfare of both the workers and the firm is at stake, observation of sanitary rules and regulations and fulfillment of obligations agreed upon. This is a matter that can well be handled within

the union organizations and the excuse so constantly given by the union leaders that "it is difficult to control so many workers in the organization wherein each worker has an equal voice," while plausible, is not reassuring as self-control is necessary to avoid chaos. The more power exercised by organizations of workers in the management means a corresponding amount of responsibility to be assumed, not the least of which is enforcement of discipline among their members where discipline means progress to the workers as a whole.

CONCEPTION AND APPLICATION OF PRODUCTION METHODS

Under the existing plan of industrial government, conception of production methods is clearly and admittedly a managerial function and the benefits derived by conception without the power of application are nil. Granting that the application of the conceived methods must be applied in a manner that will work no appreciable injustice to the worker, the fact remains that application is so closely coupled with conception that interference from the union may seriously impair the success of the most scientific plans of production.

It will be necessary for the union to distinguish between (a) the end sought to be accomplished in the interest of heightened production and (b) the safeguards intended to guard against abuse. Too frequently restrictive regulations are so onerous and unnecessary that they nullify the good which it was sought to accomplish in the first instance.

A well-formulated plan of production can easily be nullified by unnecessary restrictions. Plans requiring months of work have been abandoned because restrictions placed upon them

by the union would have prevented their success.

The unions today are not in a position to be dictatorial in passing on the application of production methods. The shop chairman or the leader of a section of workers fearful of the result of some contemplated productive methods may easily wreck a season's output by blocking the well-made plans of the management.

The average shop chairman or committee is not far enough advanced in the science of the management of industry to pass well-rounded judgments on production plans, and in the leader's efforts to lean over backwards in protecting the workers, output has frequently suffered unnecessarily, which in turn is reflected upon the workers' steady employment.

There can never be a dual leadership on the conception and application of production methods. The leadership must either be assumed by the management or by the workers and in either case the responsibility must be assumed by the side of those assuming the leadership.

The unions are not at present in a position to assume this responsibility and therefore should confine their activities toward control of the plan of organization rather than attempt to interfere with the functioning of the management and administrative organization whether it be at the machine or in the office.

SETTING OF STANDARDS

The fact that mass organization has created a dangerous condition for production cannot be questioned by the most rabid unionists. With the organization of the entire personnel of all shops of any industry, the question arises as to the type of workers on which the standard of individual production should be based.

Appreciating the fact that under the present conditions the unions have a problem to solve in taking care of the inefficient workers in their organization, the question is raised as to whether the output of the essential commodities of life is to be curtailed to the point where scarcity of merchandise will make the price prohibitive, by the union insisting that the standard of a day's work be so set that the output of all its members must be curtailed to that which can be produced by its least efficient worker.

Analysis of shop production in some of our industries will show that production as a whole has already been reduced to a dangerous point through following this policy. In the long run the curtailment to the capacity of the less efficient workers must lead directly to industrial disaster.

Mass organization has brought about this condition and the local organizations must help to solve the problem thus created. During the process of solving it must permit the management to base its standards of production at least on the average worker. Any other course will create a condition that may effectually bar the further advancement of the union in having a greater voice in the running of industry.

Perhaps the greatest economic loss to the world incident to the current disorganization in industry is the lowering of the power of the individual to work his full or normal capacity. The present restrictions put on maximum output by some labor organizations to protect the weakest and slowest of their number is creating a condition that has already become dangerous.

These restrictions tend to lower the morale of the worker as a whole and create discontent by enforced idleness during working hours. The future progress of the world and even the maintenance of the present standards

of life depend upon hard work. "Soldiering" and legalized "sabotage" on production will not produce the necessities of life, much less the luxuries so much desired by everyone. Due to incomplete organization in some branches of industry and the lack of organization in others, the organized worker has maintained his present standard of living, but the law of averages must soon prevail again and it will be well for the labor organizations to foresee the rapidly approaching conditions when it will be necessary to produce merchandise in sufficient quantities to meet their needs. Increased wages alone are not wealth. The wealth of the country depends on the availability of the commodities and luxuries of life.

QUALITY OF WORKMANSHIP

Of the various standards necessary for every manufacturing plant to maintain to meet competitors and to retain the good-will of the buying public, quality of workmanship is undoubtedly the most difficult to maintain.

Quality of workmanship even on materials that can be measured by fixed standards is difficult to maintain but on merchandise where quality of workmanship means finish, style, shape or form, measurements of which can be judged merely by feeling or general appearance, the difficulty of maintaining quality is increased immeasurably.

Each manufacturing concern must choose the field in which it will compete with its manufactured merchandise. This choice is not separate and distinct from its selling and advertising policies. Around its standards of quality practically the entire policy of the concern is constructed. Wages, hours and other working conditions may be subject to negotiations between the employer and the employes, but any

restriction placed on quality by organized labor is extremely dangerous, if not fatal, to the existence of any firm. This applies either to temporary poor workmanship or to permanent restrictions.

A temporary failure in production may be overcome at a later period, wages and hours adjusted and the price made to suit the new conditions, but poor quality of workmanship means either a dissatisfied customer—if the work is sent out—or an unnecessarily increased cost of manufacturing if the fault is remedied. In either case it means irreparable damage.

Organized labor—both as organizations and as individuals—is in some plants attempting to influence quality standards, forgetting for the moment that in doing so they are courting short-time for these plants, as quality of workmanship is demanded by the buying public today and it is sales that create steady employment.

ORGANIZED LABOR'S NEW FOUND STRENGTH

With organized labor growing constantly stronger, the problem confronting the labor leaders has changed to a considerable extent. Whereas in the past they had to struggle to maintain their strength they are now confronted with the problem of how to use to the best advantage the strength of their organizations to further the interests of industry so as to permanently maintain the improved conditions.

The one great danger lies in attempting to use their strength either to gain temporary advantages through im-

proper reductions in the working hours and increasing their pay to the extent of stagnating industry, or in attempting to take over certain managerial functions from the management at a time when they are neither prepared to assume such duties nor to shoulder the responsibility if failure should result.

Of the two evils the latter one would, in my opinion, prove the most disastrous. It may easily develop into confiscation, a condition that will bring forth a far more bitter battle between labor and management than was caused by such matters as unionism, hours of work and increased wages.

It is suggested that the best way for organized labor to use its new found strength is in improving general working conditions, in the abolition of child labor, in preventing unemployment, in securing sick and accident insurance and similar material benefits. At the same time labor can use the solidarity of its organization as the basis of furthering safe and sane management, enforcing shop discipline, encouraging increased production and backing the management in general shop control.

Using the acknowledged strength of organized labor to promote shop bickering, for blocking routine shop management or for legalized "sabotage" in hampering production, will be taking a short cut to industrial warfare, a condition that neither side desires.

Past differences must be forgotten and a mutual trust and confidence established if organized labor is to take the position due it in the field of industry.